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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: SECTARIAN STRIFE IN IRAQ, REGIONAL CONFLICTS, TENSION IN LEBANON

¶1. SUMMARY: State daily "Oman" fears that Iraqi sectarian strife will lead to civil war and carries an appeal for international help in resolving regional conflicts; private daily "Al-Watan" thinks that external actors are driving tensions in Lebanon. END SUMMARY.

COVERAGE

¶2. President Bush's meeting with Jordanian King Abdullah received front page coverage, along with the explanation that insufficient time prevented Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki from joining the talks. Violence in Iraq continued to generate front page headlines in all dailies.

IRAQI CIVIL WAR?

¶3. On November 29, a columnist writing in the state-owned daily "Oman" (circulation 38,000) asked, "Is Iraq on the Verge of Civil War?":

"Unfortunately, signs of sectarian war started showing up in Iraq a few weeks ago. This strife might portend a civil war, which is the natural beginning to any sectarian divisions that rend a nation. There are multiple reasons that underlie the environment of hate that has prevailed since the invasion in 2003. The invaders played the sectarian card just as the previous Iraqi regime had and entered into war with neighboring countries. The tyranny practiced in Iraq and the violation of Iraqis' human rights in Interior Ministry prisons provokes sectarian hatred and the desire for revenge. The new Iraq that its people desire is one that enjoys freedom and tolerance, not oppression and revenge. People want to be judged by their national identities, not their sects."

REGIONAL CONFLICTS NEED INTERNATIONAL HELP

¶4. On December 2, "Oman" also highlighted the deteriorating situation in Lebanon, Iraq, and Palestine in "Regional Situations at A Crossroads":

"The situation in Lebanon, Iraq, and Palestine is a warning about the hateful consequences and catastrophic results that could ensue if the international community does not intervene to find political solutions. Lebanon is entering a worrisome time. The conflict

between the Seniora government and the opposition reflects a new period of political stress. In Iraq, the daily tragedies there constitute a dangerous situation that could get even worse. Thus the meeting between President Bush and Al Maliki in Jordan was important in shielding the Iraqi people from additional catastrophe.

On another note, the Palestinian controversy over forming another government of national unity yields a negative image. The Israelis are using that conflict to continue policies that are biased against Palestinian rights."

TENSION IN LEBANON

¶5. On December 2, an editorial in "Al-Watan" (circulation 42,000) discussed "The Lessons of the Lebanese School":

"The history of Lebanon is full of sacrifices and political victories that qualified the country to be democratically mature and to be able to deal with its internal and external problems. The latest massive marches in the streets show the nature of the period the Lebanese are going through. They are dealing with pressures from outside powers who are trying to promote their own interests by creating internal problems in Lebanon, as they wait for the country to collapse. We hope that the Lebanese do not turn legitimate peaceful demands into bloodshed, incited by conniving external actors who would benefit from an exploding Lebanon. We want security and legitimacy for Lebanon, and hope that the country does not allow Israel to exploit the current crisis for its own ends."

GRAPPO